

Rhode Island Department of Human Services

**Office of Rehabilitation Services
and
State Rehabilitation Council**

2024 Annual Report

Daniel J. McKee
Governor



Kimberly Merolla-Brito
Director - DHS



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DECEMBER 2024

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FEBRUARY 2025

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JANUARY 2025

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
			1 New Year's Day State offices closed	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16 RICAT Meeting 2pm	17	18
19	20 M L King Day State offices closed	21	22	23	24	25
26	27 SRC Meeting 3pm - 5pm	28	29	30	31	

Message from the Director



Message from Director Kimberly Merolla-Brito

The Rhode Island Department of Human Services (DHS) is an organization of opportunity, providing an array of services to the people who need important support and resources. The agency is dedicated to creating an environment where staff and customers have the tools, resources, and support needed to thrive at home, work, and in the community.

ORS is charged with empowering Rhode Islanders who have disabilities and voluntarily wish to obtain and maintain employment, economic self-sufficiency, independence, and full integration into society. Vocational Rehabilitation, Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired (SBVI), and Disability Determination Services (DDS) provide resources which enhance the quality of life for Rhode Island residents with disabilities.

The work of the ORS team represents an important dedication to community service driven by the desire to support our community members in a variety of ways and I am proud of their work.

With that in mind, I am pleased to provide you with this annual report highlighting the important work taking place and making a positive impact for Rhode Islanders.

Kimberly Merolla-Brito
Director



JANUARY 2025

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MARCH 2025

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FEBRUARY 2025

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16	17 Presidents' Day	18	19	20	21	22
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Message from the Associate Director

On behalf of the Office of Rehabilitation Services, I am pleased to present to you the 2024 Annual Report. The mission of the Office of Rehabilitation Services has always been and continues to be to provide customized and comprehensive services to individuals with disabilities to maximize their quality of life, self-reliance, and economic independence in the community. As in past years, we have included success stories that reflect the diversity of our customers and their needs. We want to illustrate the partnership between our staff and our customers that makes vocational rehabilitation work. The investments that our staff provide our customers through the State Vocational Rehabilitation Program increases revenue at all levels of government and decreases the burden of income maintenance programs.

The accomplishments outlined in this annual report reflect favorably on the efforts of our staff who, by hard work and commitment, have continued a long tradition of serving Rhode Islanders with disabilities in all communities. We are also indebted to the Rhode Island State Rehabilitation Council, Governor's Advisory Council for the Blind and Visually Impaired, State Committee of Blind Vendors, and Rhode Island Council on Assistive Technology for their partnership and help in maximizing the potential of persons with disabilities. I also extend my appreciation to our hard-working and capable staff along with our many public and private partners, who continue to display tremendous passion and creativity to provide high quality services and innovative strategies to engage our customers and the many small and large business owners throughout the State to meet staffing goals. It truly reflects the enthusiasm, desire, and commitment to help those we mutually serve.

Inside you will read some of our individual success stories, and I am sure you will be impressed at the accomplishments of these amazing individuals. It is these stories, and many more like them, that give hope and inspiration to all of us and underscores why we do what we do here.

Joseph F. Murphy



FEBRUARY 2025

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APRIL 2025

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MARCH 2025

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
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2	3	4	5	6 ATEL Meeting 2-4pm*	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23 SRC Meeting 3pm - 5pm ZOOM	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

- ATEL Meetings are held at the PUC , 89 Jefferson Blvd., Warwick

Vocational Rehabilitation

The Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Program is the public state and federally funded program that assists individuals with disabilities to choose, prepare for, obtain, advance in, and maintain competitive integrated employment with employment being the successful outcome of services provided. It is expected that individuals with disabilities who apply for services are interested in becoming employed and understand that this is the focus of the VR program.

A Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (VRC) works with the individual to develop an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE). This plan includes an employment goal, the time expected for the individual to reach the goal, the individualized services needed, and how the services will be provided to suit the needs of the particular individual.

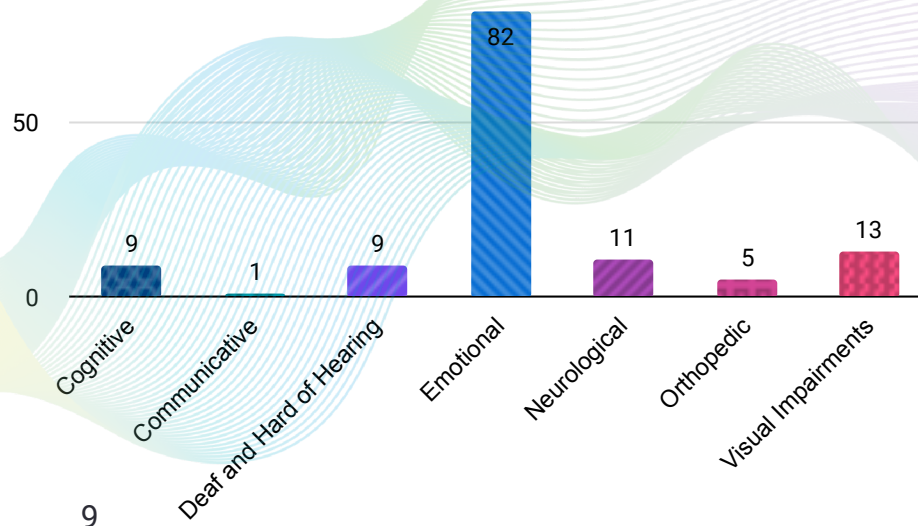
In PY2023, ORS had 947 applicants, developed 700 Individualized Plans for Employment (IPEs), and had 576 closures, of which 232 were competitive integrated employment.



Karen Davis
Administrator

Who Are Our Customers? Program Year (PY) 2023 (7/1/23 - 6/30/24)

**Primary Disability of 232
Successfully Employed
Individuals with Disabilities**



APRIL 2025

MARCH 2025

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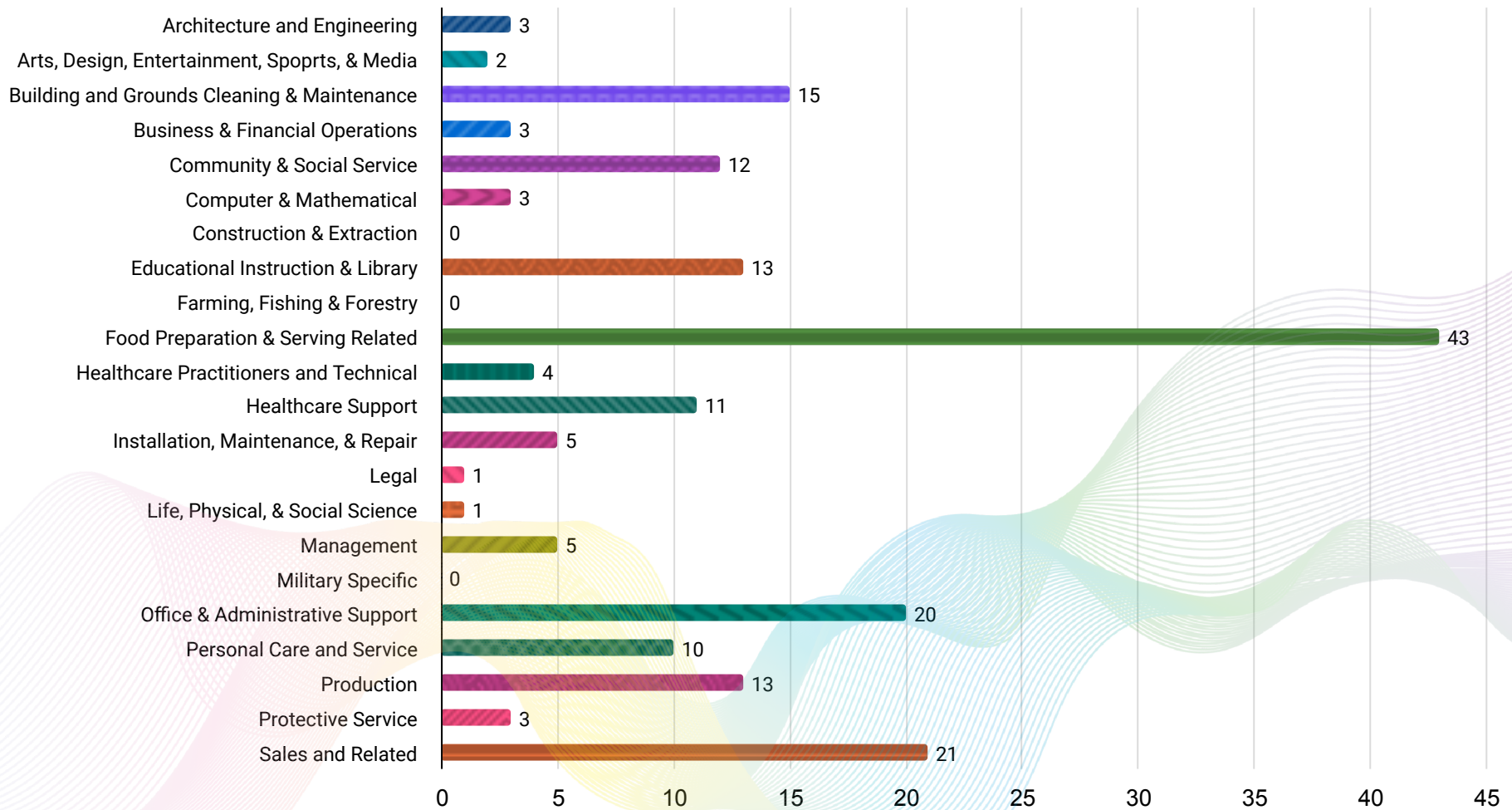
MAY 2025

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SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18 Good Friday	19
20 Easter Sunday	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30			

VR Statistics

Primary Occupation of 232 Successfully Employed Individuals with Disabilities



APRIL 2025

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JUNE 2025

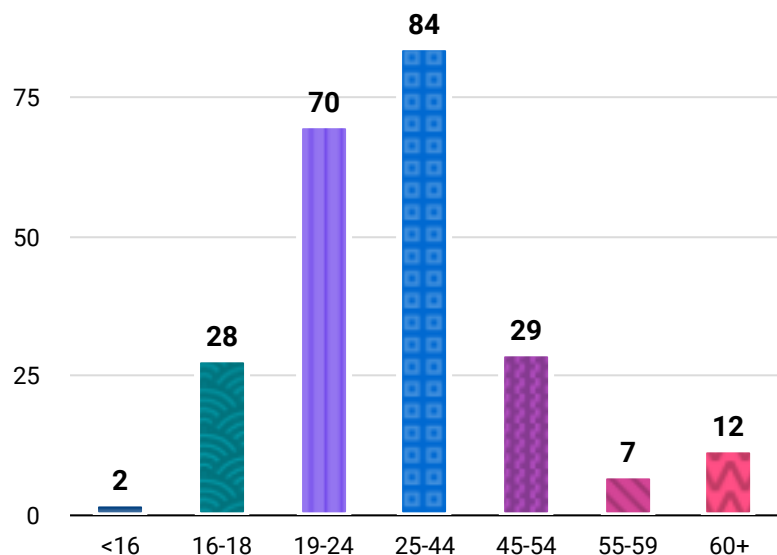
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MAY 2025

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
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11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19 SRC Annual Meeting 8:30 am - 11:00 am *	20	21	22	23	24
25	26 Memorial Day State Offices Closed	27	28	29	30	31

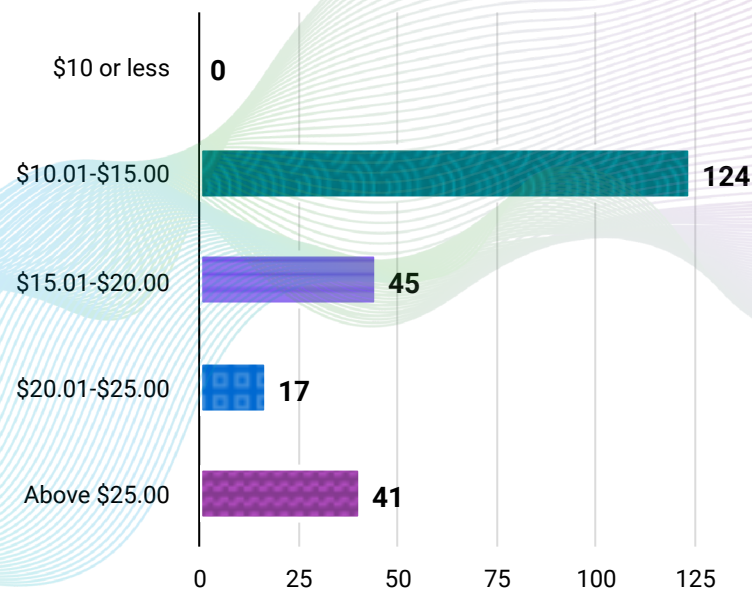
* SRC meeting is being held at Paul V. Sherlock Center on Disabilities/
Rhode Island College

Age of 232 Successfully Employed Individuals with a Disability



Gender of 232 Successfully Employed Individuals with a Disability

Hourly Wage of 232 Successfully Employed Individuals with a Disability



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JUNE 2025

JULY 2025

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SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	ATEL Meeting 2-4pm *	12	13
15	16	17	18	19 Juneteenth	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30					

- ATEL Meetings are held at PUC, 89 Jefferson Blvd, Warwick

Supported Employment

The ORS Supported Employment (SE) Services Program assists individuals with the most significant disabilities to acquire the skills and experience, along with the appropriate supports, to obtain and maintain competitive, integrated employment. ORS continues to work with Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals (BHDDH), Department of Labor and Training, Department of Education (RIDE), and Employment Specific Providers to develop services to meet the employment needs of individuals of all ages and abilities. This strong partnership strengthened due to the Consent Decree between the Department of Justice (DOJ) and the State of Rhode Island which created an atmosphere of a stronger interagency partnerships.

ORS has moved back to hybrid model of services and support for those who might benefit from it. The foundation of ORS is 1:1 in person support but a hybrid provides a customized approach for those that may need more access without direct 1:1 vocational counseling. ORS has identified virtual services as an alternative method of communication and employment service delivery for individuals who may benefit from in person virtual services. ORS continues to have in person services for individuals utilizing supported employment.

ORS and BHDDH continue working together with respective technical support providers to identify how best to meet the demand and attempt to overcome staffing shortages. ORS continues to explore the development of an Integrated Resource Team (IRT) model, which utilizes a full array of available resources in the State. Services are centered around what an individual with multiple needs requires: housing, employment, and mental health services.

ORS continues to work with supported employment fidelity models to support individuals supported by behavioral health programs and developmental disability funded programs. The specific fidelity models ORS has utilized is Individualized Placement and Support (IPS) for individuals with behavioral diagnoses, customized employment, and Project Search programs.

ORS completed an Adult Project Search at Bally's in Lincoln. This program provides individuals diagnosed with IDD the opportunity of skills training specific to employment and job placement and retention.

ORS continues to facilitate SEC (Supported Employment Council) and support in house vocational counselors and direct service providers with technical assistance, professional development regarding supported employment trends, and exploring innovative strategies to support job seekers.

Additionally, work continues to be a collaborative effort with ORS, Department of Labor and Training (DLT), BHDDH, RIDE, and Department of Human Services (DHS) to help individuals with disabilities obtain employment. This is essential interagency partnership supports the Rhode Island Employment First Initiative brought to the attention of the Governor's Office. Work is being done across several State agencies to highlight the needs of individuals with disabilities. ORS and BHDDH are working with the DLT to ensure that anyone with a disability is provided the same access to any State sponsored employment programs as those without disabilities. ORS believes that the collaboration with State Agencies and the Governor's Office will help increase employment opportunities for any individual with a disability and especially for those who need supported employment services.



Virtual Supported Employment and Non-Supported Employment Services

ORS has returned to in-person meetings but has retained the ability to provide virtual services for those who may still be hesitant about meeting in person. ORS will also offer virtual assistance to individuals who may not have a service provider in their local area but want to seek employment.

Vocational Evaluation (Virtual): Approved for adult vocational evaluations. This is a virtual/remote service that can consist of but is not limited to exploration, interest inventory testing, and virtual job shadowing.

Virtual Job Preparation: Consists of 9 hours per week for 4 weeks; scheduling of classes is up to the provider at a minimum of 9 hours per week. All other services similar to non-virtual job prep should include a resume and interviewing skills as part of reporting.

Job Retention: Service can be provided virtually and would include at least weekly phone calls to check in with the employer (if necessary) and the client.

Job Coaching Services: Provided virtually and telephonically.

JUNE 2025

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AUGUST 2025

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JULY 2025

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
		1	2	3	4 Independence Day State Offices Closed	5
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Transition and Pre-Employment Transition Services

The Office of Rehabilitation Services provides transition services to students with disabilities to prepare them for adult life. ORS Counselors are working with all school districts, students, and families to prepare for career development, job training, and employment opportunities before and after high school. Transition and Pre-Employment Transitions Services (Pre-ETS) are activities and supports designed to help the students identify their interests and strengths so that they can work on skills needed to be successful in employment and their future.



Project | Search

Project SEARCH is a national organization that partnered with Cranston Public Schools, with the goal of preparing young people with developmental and intellectual disabilities for success in competitive, integrated employment.

Project SEARCH job coaches and instructors provide support and guidance for the interns alongside their work supervisors, to assist with any work-related questions and to ensure internship goals are being met each day.

In addition to working toward the ultimate goal of permanent employment upon graduation for its students, Project SEARCH provides classroom instruction around career search exploration, independent living skills, travel training for public transportation, monthly employment conferences, and adult services. To accomplish its goals, Project SEARCH partners with the State Office of Rehabilitation Services, Perspectives Corporation, and the Rhode Island Department of Behavioral Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Hospitals.

Business Engagement Specialist Team (BEST)

Since 2019, a group comprised of Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors (VRC's) with guidance from regional supervisors, assistant administrator for vendor affairs & workforce development, and the administrator of vocational rehabilitation began to meet regularly with the intention of formally establishing a Business Engagement Specialist Team (BEST). Part of this was driven by the VRC's recognition that there is a critical lack of awareness of the agency and the services in the business community. Many VRCs found out in reaching out to businesses there was no organized procedure in place to do so. Additionally, WIOA federal regulations mandate that state Vocational Rehabilitation agencies consider businesses as a secondary VR customer. The need to engage with the business community is a critical piece of WIOA to develop work-based learning for students and youth with disabilities and employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities, including those with the most significant disabilities.

The BEST unit is a specialized unit that markets ORS's services to the business community by educating businesses about the role of ORS. The team also supports business' staffing needs, including screening and identifying qualified job applicants, dispelling myths around employing individuals with disabilities through education, and educating Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors and job seekers about labor market demand. This group saw an opportunity to formally establish themselves within the agency and began meeting regularly to work diligently with technical assistance from Workforce Innovation Technical Assistance Center (WINTAC) - now Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center (VRTAC.) As a result of the BEST Team's efforts and the number of requests from the business community to partner, ORS decided to expand BEST by assigning additional counselors to the team to ensure that ORS can deliver the same level of support and services to current and future community business partners. Each region of ORS is now represented by at least one counselor, with most having two representatives.

JULY 2025

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SEPTEMBER 2025

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AUGUST 2025

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	11 Victory Day State Offices Closed	12	13	14	15	16
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Services for the Blind & Visually Impaired (SBVI)

Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired (SBVI) offers a wide array of services to eligible individuals who are blind or visually impaired through its Vocational Rehabilitation Unit, Business Enterprises Program, and Social Services Program. The various services offered by these programs are designed to help individuals of all ages achieve independence at home, in the community, and in the workplace.

Vocational Rehabilitation Program... A Federal/State Program created to assist people who are blind or visually impaired to obtain or maintain employment. Services provided include evaluation, orientation, mobility training, rehabilitation technology, guidance and counseling, career assessment, educational planning, vocational training, provision of adaptive equipment, job development, job placement, and follow-up services.

Business Enterprises Program... The Federal/State Randolph-Sheppard Program which provides entrepreneurial employment opportunities for persons who are legally blind. Business Enterprises establishes vending facilities in state and federal buildings which are operated by licensed vendors supervised by SBVI. Presently there are 15 locations throughout the state. Types of facilities include vending machines, micro markets, small coffee shops, larger food service sites serving hot and cold entrees prepared on-site. All operate under the name of "Coffee Plus".

- **15** Vending facilities are supported by the Randolph-Sheppard Business Enterprises Program (BEP) at Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired. These **15** facilities collectively also provided employment for numerous individuals around the state. Multiple operators have a second location they managed with operations continuing to adjust to the changing market and post-pandemic environment.

Social Services Program... Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired coordinates a federal comprehensive service program which focuses primarily on children from age 3 - 14, elderly individuals, and individuals for whom a vocational goal is not feasible.

- Rhode Island again recognized its annual White Cane Awareness Day celebration on October 17, 2024.

NEWSLINE: A newspaper reading services provided by the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) funded by SBVI.

- **565** individuals are registered for this service with **16** new subscribers.

Children's Case Management Services include family casework, coordination with early intervention programs, educational guidance, summer camp for youths, arrangement of ophthalmologist and low vision evaluations, and information and referral to appropriate community programs. RISBVI continue its role of supporting parents through advocacy and service coordination for children with severe visual impairments.

Independent Living for Older Blind Program provides case management services, along with ancillary services for mobility and orientation, rehabilitation teaching for skills training in activities of daily living, management of low vision, provisions of adaptive equipment, and information and referral to support groups and appropriate community services.

- **265** older individuals who are blind or visually impaired (over age 55) received services from this program allowing **95%** to report feeling more confident and in greater control. **100% (249 people)** of individuals receiving assistive technology (AT) services and training maintained or improved functional abilities that were previously lost or diminished as a result of vision.

Assistive Technology Access Partnership (ATAP)... The Office of Rehabilitation Services is the lead agency for the Rhode Island Assistive Technology Access Partnership (ATAP). ATAP is a statewide program funded under the Assistive Technology Act of 1998. ATAP is designed as a statewide partnership of organizations, each with a targeted assistive technology focus, working together to improve access to and acquisition of assistive technology for individuals. ATAP's main initiatives include: Device Demonstration, Device Loan, Device Re-Use, and Training, Public Awareness, Collaboration, Information and Referral.

In total Statewide, **248** individuals were provided AT devices; **104** individuals received demonstrations; **904** individuals received training; and **1,695** individuals received information about AT from ATAP Resource Centers. ATAP Partners include Adaptive Telephone Equipment Loan Program (ATEL), East Bay Educational Collaborative (EBEC), Ocean State Center for Independent Living (OSCIL), and TechACCESS of RI.

Adaptive Telephone Equipment Loan Program (ATEL)... The ATEL Program loans telephone equipment to residents of the State of Rhode Island who have hearing, speech, or neuro-muscular (unable to dial or hold a receiver) impairments and have a signed certificate of disability. Equipment is issued on a first-come, first-served basis.

102 individuals were provided with specialized equipment through ATEL.

AUGUST 2025

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OCTOBER 2025

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SEPTEMBER 2025

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
	1 Labor Day State Offices Closed	2	3	4 ATEL Meeting 2-4pm*	5	6
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14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30				

- ATEL Meetings are held at the PUC, 89 Jefferson Blvd, Warwick

Disability Determination Services (DDS)

The Rhode Island Disability Determination Services (RI DDS) is a unit within the Office of Rehabilitation Services, which operates under a “state-federal” partnership. The function of the RI DDS is to make determinations as to the medical eligibility of adults and children with physical and/or mental impairments who have applied for Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and/or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits.

The RI DDS is assigned a budgeted workload under a regulatory agreement with the Social Security Administration (SSA). The RI DDS is 100 percent financed by SSA to adjudicate initial disability applications, appeals of cases initially denied, and continuing disability reviews. The RI DDS also performs disability hearings on cases in which benefits have been terminated.

In total, the RI DDS processed **12,205** disability cases this year. Based on an anticipated increase in staffing and an expected increase in intake, RI DDS anticipates processing approximately **13,000** cases in FFY2024. RI DDS has completed the transition to the new computer system that SSA developed. The system is referred to as National Case Processing System (NCPS). The roll out began in March of 2017. Currently 100% of the staff are using the system. SSA is constantly improving the software and tools that the examiners use in their daily functions to enhance timely and accurate decisions and make the system more functional for users. Rhode Island was one of the first states to switch over to DCPS, and now all states in the country are working in this case processing system.

In FFY 2024 RI DDS had three examiner losses. These vacant positions could not be filled due to a federal hiring freeze. This decrease in staffing presented challenges that resulted in a slight decrease in productivity and slight increase in processing time in FFY24.

In FFY 2024 RI DDS processed **12,205** disability claims. The RI DDS has been able to maintain excellent accuracy ratings of **97.7%**. FFY24 ended with an overall processing time of 136 which is below the national threshold of **230** days.

Rhode Island continues to operate a Cooperative Disability Investigations (CDI) unit to help combat fraud in the program. This unit investigates fraud at initial and reconsideration applications, prior to claimants being put in pay status. Recently, they have been able to work fraud cases for individuals already in pay status. The referrals come from the field offices, DDS, and the public. The CDI unit consists of a DDS examiner, a field office representative, two investigators from the Attorney General’s office, and a special agent. SSA continues to put a high emphasis on combatting fraud in the program.



DDS Statistics for FFY 2024

11,438 Total cases were received by the Disability Determination Services (DDS)

12,205 Claims were processed by the DDS

7,404 Initial claims were filed

7,644 Initial claims were processed

2,950 Continuing Disability Review cases were completed

227 Pre-Hearing Cases were processed, resulting in **149** Disability Hearing decisions

3631 Consultative Exams were purchased

10,999 Medical Evidence Records were purchased

\$1,077,168 Total Medical Costs with Total DDS Budget of **\$ 11,882,146**

SEPTEMBER 2025

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NOVEMBER 2025

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OCTOBER 2025

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
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5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13 Columbus Day State Offices Closed	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

Disability Determination Services (DDS)

(continued)

Local Social Security Field Offices

30 Quaker Lane, 1st Floor
Warwick, RI 02886-0111
1-866-964-2038

4 Pleasant Street
Pawtucket, RI 02860
1-866-931-7079

Pavilion Plaza 2168 Diamond Hill Road
Woonsocket, RI 02895
1-877-229-3542

130 Bellevue Avenue
Newport, RI 02840
1-866-253-5607

1 Empire Plaza, 6th floor
Providence, RI 02903
1-877-402-0808

2023 Raymond A. Carroll Award *Linda Deschenes - Assistant Administrator*



The Raymond A. Carroll Award is given to an individual who exemplifies the same dedication in serving individuals with disabilities as Mr. Carroll had during his 42 years of state service. Raymond Carroll began his career at the Office of Rehabilitation Services in 1966 and retired in 2008. During that time, he demonstrated his awareness of the needs of individuals with disabilities and was a dedicated and effective advocate for improving the standards set for programs providing services for those individuals with disabilities.

Linda was nominated for being that person who holds herself and others to a high standard and remembers all that other may have forgotten or have wanted to forget. Some comments from staff nominating Linda for this award include: "She helps to keep the Agency running in those areas that the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) holds us accountable"; "She is willing to chip in when things get hairy or out of control"; "She has been a valuable asset to the agency"; and "She is a fountain of knowledge and a great sounding board for initiatives".

Linda began her career at ORS as a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor I in 2003 and was promoted to Strategic Planning Supervisor in 2010. Her next role was as Assistant Administrator of Operations began in September 2015 and is the position she will be retiring from in 2024.

Past Recipients

2011 - Sharon DiPinto
Sr. Human Services Policy & Systems Spec.

2012 - Kathy McCabe
Sr. Rehabilitation Counselor

2013 - Sherry Olink
Jr. Resource Specialist

2014 - Teresa Scaramuzzo-DiMattia
Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor II

2015 - Rosemary Feeney
Sr. Human Services Business Officer

2016 - Paula Stachelek
Word Processing Typist

2017 - Sheridan Lomax
Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor

2018 - Rosemarie Aponte
Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor

2019 - Karen Davis
Asst. Administrator - Supported Employment

2020 - Michelle DeVita
Sr. Word Processing Typist

2021 - Daniel Moitoso
Desktop Support Specialist

2022 - Patricia Robert
Clerk Secretary

OCTOBER 2025

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NOVEMBER 2025

DECEMBER 2025

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SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11 Veterans Day State Offices Closed		13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27 Thanksgiving Day State Offices Closed	28	29
30						

Max Burger Customer Service Aide

Max Burger has been involved with ORS since August 2023. He is a very friendly, outgoing, social, and highly motivated gentleman. Max has been successfully employed by The State of RI/Department of Health and Human Services since December 2023 as a Customer Service Aide where he works 35 hours per week. His duties include greeting and registering customers into the eligibility system, producing, filing, and indexing digital copies of documents. Max also is responsible for assemble, compile, verify and analyze routine statistical data, code data for mechanical tabulations, prepare, verify, process, and maintain office records and reports.

Max states “Within my role as Customer Service Aide, I help clients apply for government benefits for those in need such as: Food Stamps, Medicaid, General Public Assistance, Refugee and regular Cash Assistance, Childcare, State Supplemental Payments, Medicare, and Long-Term Services and Support. I assist all these clients with filling out the applications, clearing documents out of Workflow, utilizing the translation hotline service, answering their questions, scheduling their appointments, completing electronic application registration, making copies of documents, and scanning them into the cases accordingly. I am most proud of seeing the clients walk out of the building in a better situation than when they were first walking into the office. The aspect of the department I like the most is the supervisor’s willingness to assist and offer guidance whenever we ask for it”.

Max was assisted by ORS with the following services: Vocational Evaluation, Job Development, Job Placement, Job Retention and Supports along with Brokerage Services with Iraida Williams through LAZO. Max was assisted with his vocational services through Access Point RI and developed a great relationship with his Job Developer Jennifer Fraser.

Max is doing phenomenal at his job and is an integral part of his office at the Department of Health and Human Services. He has a great relationship with his coworkers and with his Supervisors Laurie O’Neil (in attached picture) and Alfreda Moore at DHS. Max recently passed the Eligibility Technician civil service exam. He is currently waiting for a promotion as Eligibility Technician or Employment and Career Advisor within DHS.

Counselor: Gina Albanese

Max is a pleasure to work with. He has worked diligently to gain an understanding of DHS programs and systems as it relates to the work he does. Each day, Max comes in eager to work and greets customers with courtesy and respect. We are proud of the work he does and grateful to have him on our team!

Linda DeMoranville,
Administrator,
Family and Adult
Services



Max and Laurie O'Neil



NOVEMBER 2025

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JANUARY 2026

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DECEMBER 2025

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	ATEL Meeting 2-4pm *	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31	Christmas State Offices Closed	

- ATEL Meetings are held at the PUC, 89 Jefferson Blvd, Warwick

Ryan Gray Customer Service Aide

Ryan is a 26-year-old young male who applied for VR services as he needed assistance in obtaining and retaining gainful employment. Ryan had worked with ORS while in high school, and at that time he received Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS). After graduating from high school, Ryan went on to study at the University of Rhode Island (URI), and while completing his studies he reengaged with ORS for services to secure part-time employment.



"I appreciate you reaching out! I am doing pretty well, every day comes with new challenges and accomplishments at Brightview, which I am now mostly acclimated to. I understand, thank you so much for all your support."
~ Ryan ~

Ryan started working with the Holistic Development Center (HDC) on job development and placement services, and with their assistance he secured employment in 2021 at Shaw's Supermarket as a Courtesy Clerk. Ryan's case closed successfully as he remained employed for more than 3 months. Even though Ryan was still employed at Shaw's, in June 2022 he reapplied for services as he was seeking assistance to secure additional employment. Ryan had graduated from URI with a bachelor's degree in history and was now interested in working more hours. His counselor referred back to HDC and they started working toward securing additional employment. While Ryan was working with HDC, his counselor also worked with a group of counselors in the South County Region who are also members of the Business Engagement Specialist Team (BEST) here at ORS to assist in preparing Ryan for interviewing, and possible job development through employers that counselors had personal contact with. As part of this effort, a meeting with the Executive Director of the South County Chamber of Commerce, Joe Viele, took place to discuss Ryan's case and the potential employers in the South County area.

Ryan continued to work with HDC and apply for jobs until an opportunity came along in August 2023 at Brightview Senior Living in South Kingstown. Ryan interviewed for the position, and he was offered the job as a Concierge. He started the job while maintaining his other job at Shaw's. Ryan received retention services, and time-limited job coaching as he needed assistance with time management to be able to coordinate both work schedules. Ryan recently left Shaw's and is currently working full-time at Brightview.

When Ryan was initially contacted by Natalia to see if he was interested in having his story highlighted in the ORS Annual Report, his response was "I appreciate you reaching out! I am doing pretty well, every day comes with new challenges and accomplishments at Brightview, which I am now mostly acclimated to. I understand, thank you so much for all your support."

Counselor: Natalia Montoya



Michael Ray Store Maintenance

Michael is 68-year-old male who applied for VR services as he needed assistance in obtaining and retaining gainful employment. Michael had worked with ORS in the past and had returned years later. When Michael reapplied for services, he was referred to Career Construction RI. There he completed a 30-hour community based work experience.

During that experience Michael's strengths and needs were accessed, and it appeared the role for a janitor and cleaner position should be attempted, and the Burlington coat factory would be a perfect fit. The results of Michael's work experience presented outstanding feedback.

Now that a perfect job was identified, Michael had concerns about his Social Security and how his benefits he was receiving would be affected. ORS spoke with two benefits planners and learned Michael's Social Security would not be affected due to his age. As a result of this news, Michael successfully gained employment with the help from his network of supports including Deb (friend), and Chantele (vendor), who assisted Michael in searching and finding a part-time cleaning associate job.

On September 20, 2023, Michael started his position at the TJX companies where he is responsible for maintaining a clean and organized store environment, with a focus on floor care. Responsibilities include the operation of the scrubber and buffer, dust mopping, damp mopping, sweeping, cleaning, and spot cleaning. Michael has been praised by his co-workers for his outstanding work effort, positive attitude and welcoming smile that he greets his fellow employees on a day-to-day basis with.

Michael was successfully closed on February 1st as he has obtained successful job employment.

When ORS initially contacted Michael to see if he was interested in having his story highlighted in the annual report his response was how "I couldn't be happier, I really enjoy what I do."

Counselor: Teresa O'Brien



L. S. Houseman

Nursing and Rehabilitation Center



This client noticed over time that he was having trouble communicating and understanding what his coworkers, as well as the residents at the assisted living and rehabilitation center where he works as a houseman, were saying. He quickly grew concerned and wondered how he would be able to communicate properly if he couldn't hear what people were saying.

This client decided it was time to act, so he purchased a pair of over-the-counter hearing aids for himself. While over-the-counter aids may work better for some, for this client they were inadequate.

He visited an audiologist where he was recommended and prescribed hearing aids. These hearing aids he was allowed to demo were terrific! However, the cost to purchase was far too high for him. His audiologist urged him to contact The Rhode Island Office of Rehabilitation Services for assistance.

After meeting with a counselor at ORS this client discovered that he would be deemed eligible for ORS services based on his hearing loss. He therefore learned that he would be able to receive financial assistance, as well as counseling about managing his hearing loss.

ORS assisted him with being able to maintain his current employment.

Counselor: Paul Hughett



Assistive Technology Access Partnership (ATAP)

Success Story Briefs

Norma is a woman in her late 70s with increasing hearing loss and other health issues. It is important that she be able to maintain communications with her doctors. She contacted ATEL to report it was becoming harder to hear on her amplified cordless phone. A home visit was set up so she could try out the new Clarity system Teltex Deluxe GLT Captioning Tablet that includes a tablet that used automatic speech recognition to provide captions without an internet connection. The system was set up for her. After trying it for a bit she decided she would prefer to stay with the amplified phone that she already has. She reported that she found it overwhelming to listen and read at the same time. She felt that she was able to hear better on the cordless XLC3.4 because she is “100 percent focused on listening” She found the captions distracting and thus making it harder for her to comprehend. I discussed strategies she could employ while talking on the phone such as reminding people to speak clearly and making sure she is in a quiet environment (she tends to have her TV playing when she makes and receives phone calls). Although it initially appeared the system with the captioning tablet would be ideal for her. A hands-on demonstration allowed her to identify what works best for her personally. Something that cannot be measured with hearing test results.

Thomas has a chronic speech disability after his stroke. He presents with moderate dysarthria and dysphonia, resulting in effortful, labored speech with poor intelligibility. He has received outpatient speech therapy to these deficits, and has made some limited improvements; however, it is most likely that his current level of speech disability will remain. He is testing the new Voicett App to help improve his communication.

Charles D is a 97-year-old veteran with almost no hearing left. He had received an old Captel telephone 8 years ago, but it wasn't working well. We replaced it with a new Captel 2400 that had a much bigger screen and speaker phone. Also, with the new Captel, it now has Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR) instead of Captioning Assistants (CA) making communication much quicker. While ATEL Program Director was there his granddaughter called with exciting information about her new job, and he had no problem following along with the conversation.

Charles D wasn't able to understand ATEL Program Director when they were talking after he hung up with his granddaughter, so she loaned him an android tablet and showed him how to use an app called Live Transcribe so he could also read in person conversations. He was so excited that now he could go to the Senior Center and know what people were saying so he could participate. He later returned tablet, and purchased his own 😊

Rhode Island State Rehabilitation Council

The State Rehabilitation Councils (SRCs) are the consumer voice for the VR program. Federally-mandated membership requirements include a broad range of stakeholders to ensure that various constituencies have a voice in the conduct of the VR agency. This consumer voice is absolutely necessary for the VR program to partner with individuals with disabilities to jointly facilitate the accomplishment of their dreams of independence, full community integration, and employment.

SRC members represent the state agency to a broad array of partners such as employers, parents, educators, community rehabilitation programs, and other stakeholders in the VR program. They reinforce the value that individuals with disabilities are able to achieve quality employment outcomes and become contributing members of society.

Though mandated by federal law, the partnership between SRCs and VR extends beyond the shared accomplishment of mandated tasks. Specifically, the partnership is a call to action to advocate for and to hear the voices of the people served by VR. The partnership must be a commitment and priority for the partners in order to make the VR system a change agent whose goal is to assist people with disabilities to become employed in integrated, competitive employment!

(McGuire-Kuletz, M., Tomlinson, P., & Hurley, K.B. 2019). McGuire-Kuletz, M., Tomlinson, P., & Hurley, K.B. page 1 (2019). The State Rehabilitation Council – vocational rehabilitation partnership under WIOA - Washington, DC: The George Washington University, Center for Rehabilitation Counseling Research and Education.



Left Back to Front: Nicole Rico Serrano, Renee Rico, Liv Lozia, Natalia Montoya, Joe Murphy, Melissa Brusso

Right Back to Front: Morna Murray, Regina Connor, Judi Drew, Christine Yankee, Karen Davis, Tracy Cunningham



SRC Letter from the Chair

Dear Consumers, Families, Friends, Partners, and Stakeholders:

It is an honor to present the FY2024 Rhode Island State Rehabilitation Council Annual Report.

The State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) comprises people with disabilities, family members, employers, and those interested in ensuring that people with disabilities have access to support and services that help create career opportunities. This collaboration is necessary as we advise the Office of Rehabilitation Services (ORS) and work to improve the systems that support individuals with disabilities.

As we reflect upon this past year, I want to highlight the work of the Office of Rehabilitation Services, and how the ORS has responded to the far-reaching challenges of the pandemic as it plans for the future. The State Rehabilitation Council has strongly supported the ORS in its work on behalf of people with disabilities. The following is an overview of the Council's and the ORS's collaborative activities, along with some goals for the upcoming year:

- **2024 Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment.** The Council created and conducted surveys for employers and for community rehabilitation providers. We will work with the ORS to assess the need to establish, develop, or improve community rehabilitation programs within the state, as well as keeping engagement with employers. We are hopeful that the collected data will give us new insight into these two areas and allow us to refine the upcoming state plan to better focus on employment strategies.

Additionally, the Council assisted the ORS with two focus groups to foster dialogue about pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS): one for educators and one for families and students with disabilities. We will work with the ORS to examine future needs or modifications for pre-employment transition services or other transition services. We will assess the extent to which such services provided by the ORS are coordinated with transition services provided under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

The ORS's thoughtful and thorough work in assessing the coordination of services that they provide will inform their strategies moving forward, to ensure alignment with the Americans with Disabilities Education Act and with the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA).

- **Order of Selection (OOS).** The Council remains committed to monitoring the ORS regarding the Order of Selection (OOS) and the waitlist for employment services. We are pleased to report that this year, once again, there were no consumers on the waitlist—a testament to the ORS's efforts to eliminate the waitlist. We applaud the ORS's hard work in ensuring that all consumers are promptly connected with the employment services that they are seeking.



- **Virtual/Open Meetings.** A significant focus this year has been advocating for increased accessibility to public meetings. We have actively pursued changes to the Open Meetings Law to allow for virtual meeting options, particularly crucial for individuals with disabilities who may face barriers to in-person attendance. While we have encountered setbacks, we remain optimistic about the potential for progress in the coming year, especially with the combined efforts of many committees and councils.

Learning from the Council's past success with virtual meetings, we have adapted our meeting schedule to further engage membership and allow for more participation. Moving forward, we are hopeful that the changes will lead to increased membership and diversity, especially for those who are restricted in their ability to attend in-person meetings.

- **Membership Recruitment.** The Council is committed to fostering a diverse and inclusive council that reflects the needs and perspectives of the individuals we serve. To that end, we have been actively recruiting new members with a range of experiences and expertise. By strengthening our council's diversity, we aim to amplify the voices of individuals with disabilities and ensure that their needs are prioritized.

The Council applauds the ORS Counselors and their vendors for keeping the momentum going with transition activities, career exploration, and virtual career events that were created during the pandemic. Keeping these innovative practices in place has served our consumers well and resulted in easier access to ORS services. We also acknowledge the efforts of the ORS to attract and retain the most qualified Counselors with the goal (which the ORS met!) of fully staffing the agency.

Looking forward, we aim to strengthen our collaboration with community organizations, improve our training offerings, and showcase success stories to inspire both individuals with disabilities and potential employers. Together, we can foster an inclusive environment that empowers everyone to thrive in the workforce.

Acknowledgments

We want to thank the ORS and their vendors publicly for their contributions to the growth of our consumers and to let you know your voices and enthusiasm continue to exemplify the best of vocational rehabilitation work in Rhode Island.

Looking Ahead

The Council will continue to fulfill its role by staying abreast and supporting the progress that the State of Rhode Island and the ORS are making in fulfilling its responsibilities under the 2014 Rhode Island vs. US DOJ Consent Decree.

We continue to support the ORS as it works to assist with the employment needs of Rhode Islanders with disabilities.

I am honored to serve as Chair of the SRC, and excited about the work in the year ahead. It is important to recognize the countless volunteer hours Rhode Island SRC members complete throughout the year to achieve the Council's goals.

Thank you for your ongoing support and dedication to our shared mission.

Respectfully Submitted,

Melissa Brusso, Chair



The Council's Mission

To work with the Office of Rehabilitation Services (ORS) assuring that all Rhode Islanders with disabilities are able to obtain and keep meaningful and satisfying employment.

Our Vision

- The SRC is an independent body of diverse members that works together to insure continuous improvement in ORS employment outcomes.
- Through enhancing communication among all people and groups committed to increasing opportunity for people with disabilities.
- By increasing employer awareness of people with disabilities as a productive human resource pool.
- And conducting a review and analysis of the effectiveness of consumer satisfaction with the functions and activities of the State Agency as they relate to employment outcomes.

Our Partners

The Office of Rehabilitation Services (ORS);
The Rhode Island State Independent Living Council;
The Governor's Workforce Board; and
The Governor's Commission on Disabilities

Statement of Partnership and Common Purpose

The Rhode Island State Rehabilitation Council leads an active, constructive, and enduring partnership with the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Services. We share a common commitment to cultivating credibility and trust in our partnership by sharing information, program and performance data, experience, and expertise. Together we ensure that eligible Rhode Islanders seeking vocational rehabilitation services can be confident that vocational counseling and guidance will be individualized and effective.

The Council strengthens the vocational rehabilitation program and the state of the environment the program operates in, by asking strategic questions; examining internal and external pressures which influence service delivery and the program's capacity to recruit, support, promote and retain knowledgeable, skilled professionals to administer operations and provide direct services; and, make recommendations to improve policy and practice. The desired outcome of our partnership is to enable each participant in the VR program to identify a specific employment goal and then empower him or her to develop and implement a plan for achieving it.

We are always seeking talented and committed individuals who can share their insight with the Council; with our partner, the Office of Rehabilitation Services; and with the diverse population of Rhode Islanders with disabilities whose needs we acknowledge and serve.

Goals of the Council

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act charges the State Rehabilitation Council with meeting the following goals:

- Review, analyze, and advise the ORS regarding the performance of their responsibilities in planning, developing, and implementing, services to persons with disabilities in order to affect competitive employment outcomes.
- Advise and assist in the application of the State Plan, strategic plans, reports, needs assessments, and evaluations required under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended.
- Conduct a review and analysis of the effectiveness of consumer satisfaction with the functions and activities of the State Agency as they relate to employment outcomes.
- Advise the State Agency and provide for working relationships between the State Agency and the Statewide Independent Living Council.
- Perform such other functions as the Council deems appropriate and that are comparable to the other functions performed by the Council; and
- Prepare and submit an Annual Report to the Governor and the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA).

2024 – 2025 State Rehabilitation Council Meeting Schedule

November 4, 2024, 3 PM – 5 PM (ZOOM)
January 27, 2025 3 PM – 5 PM (Paul V. Sherlock Center on Disabilities / RI College)
March 24 2025 3 PM – 5 PM (ZOOM)
May 19, 2025 8:30 AM – 11:00 AM (Paul V. Sherlock Center on Disabilities / RI College)

If you want more information about the RISRC, please contact Nancy Baker at (401) 462-7811.
You can also visit our webpage <http://www.ors.ri.gov/SRC.html>

Membership Training Committee

The Membership Training Committee is still recovering from the past few difficult years due to Covid-19 and is now developing a mentorship program for new members. We will use this program to acquaint new members with the work of the SRC and to assist them in becoming fully engaged in our committee work through advocacy in their communities and support of the ORS' initiatives. A training event is also in the works to refresh the work of Council members.

The Membership Training Sub-Committee is charged with the interviewing, orientation, and training of new members including disseminating new materials and providing an annual training event in partnership with the ORS. A mentoring program is available to new members for their first year on the Council.

The Committee's Goals:

Maintain an annual event to ensure that all new and existing members can participate in updated training.

Disseminate a membership package to all members, offering materials that clearly state the SRC mission, vision, responsibilities, and contact information along with other relevant materials.

Sustain ongoing efforts toward active recruitment of qualified individuals to its membership. Candidates must represent the interests of the stakeholders and represent a diverse composition that reflects the needs of the populations served, while meeting the federal requirements. SRC members represent people with disabilities, advocates and family members, employers, and rehabilitation and education professionals. Recruitment of new members is an ongoing, shared responsibility of ALL council members.

Implement a Mentoring Program that will pair new members with experienced members to answer any questions and clarify responsibilities and expectations of the council for at least one year.

Committee Accomplishments:

The Mentoring Program will be available to all new members.

The responsibility of current SRC members, and especially the Training Committee, is to recruit new members.



State Plan, Policy, and Quality Assurance Committee

The State Plan, Policy, and Quality Assurance Committee of the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) leads the SRC to provide meaningful comments and feedback to the ORS. The committee leads the review of the quality of the ORS service delivery to the ORS customers by engaging in comment on plans and policies, the Comprehensive Needs Assessment, and the vocational rehabilitation portion of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Combined State Plan.

This year, the Committee's work took place in-person. The committee helped to formulate a position letter to the Governor's Commission on Disabilities to support changes to the Open Meetings regulations so that virtual meetings would continue to be available. Although the committee did not meet in person, we enjoyed being able to meet with the full Council at the May 2023 breakfast meeting.

During the last few years, the committee's focus has been working with the ORS to produce a monthly survey of consumers. This data is used as part of the ORS's Comprehensive Needs Assessment and was incorporated into the State Plan update.

In the later part of this year, the SRC received the ORS State Plan updates. We initially began to plan the work. This process resulted in engaging more Council members to participate in the work of the State Plan to capture the diverse voices that could bring different perspectives and provide meaningful feedback to the ORS. The initial stages of planning consisted of receipt of the updates to the state plan from the ORS. We then requested that the ORS meet with the members of our Council to explain the changes in each section. The ORS did meet with us virtually and provided a helpful framework and highlighted important issues. The Council found this to be immensely helpful. Our work continued through the process until we submitted our comments to the Office of Rehabilitation Services.

The committee looks forward to continued updates.



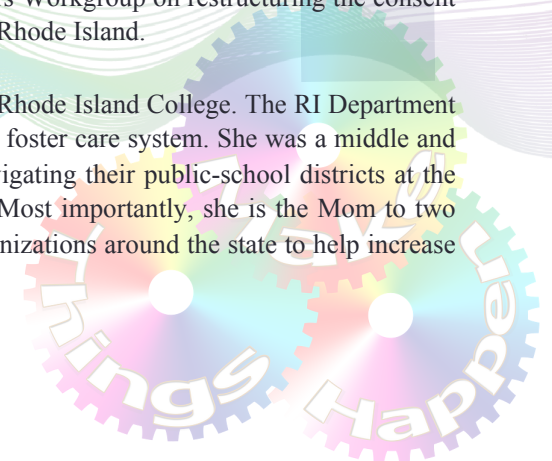
Rhode Island State Rehabilitation Council Members

Melissa D. Brusso is Chair of the Council and the Chair of the Membership Training Committee. She sits on the Council as a representative of a Disability Advocacy Group representing individuals with physical, cognitive, sensory, or mental disabilities who have difficulty in representing themselves or are unable due to their disabilities to represent themselves. She is an Educational Advocate at the Paul V. Sherlock Center on Disabilities at Rhode Island College. She has worked in educational advocacy for a total of eighteen years, first with the Office of the Child Advocate and the Paul V. Sherlock Center on Disabilities, and later with Justice Resource Institute in Massachusetts. She has worked in adult education and ESL at Dorcas International Institute of RI, helping recently resettled refugee students and other newcomers through the process of beginning their English education. She is appointed by the RI Department of Education to make educational decisions for children and youth in foster care throughout Rhode Island. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree from Providence College, and a Master's Degree from Rhode Island College.

Regina Connor worked for more than 30 years in the field of rehabilitation. She began as a Rehabilitation Teacher for the Blind, providing instruction in activities of daily living. Later, upon earning a Master of Arts Degree in Rehabilitation Counseling from Rhode Island College, she began working as a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor. Throughout the years, she was promoted to Senior VR Counselor, Supervisor, State Coordinator for the Deaf, and Program Director for the state's Assistive Technology Act program. Upon retirement, she still remains active in the disability community as the Chairperson of the Governor's Advisory Council for the Blind and Visually Impaired. Regina has worked to pass legislation to benefit people with disabilities in the areas of employment and education.

Nina Fiasconaro is on the State Plan, Policy, and Quality Assurance Committee. She is part of the Council representing a parent who had a highly involved son with disabilities. She started advocating for people with disabilities and participating in various committees at Jawonio, which was the UCP of Rockland NY and CPW, which was the UCP for Westchester NY. From 2010 to 2016, she was on the Board of Directors and was the Director of Development for The Miracle League of Westchester helping develop and run after-school programs for children with disabilities. Also, during that period, she participated in the Family Support Services Advisory Council of Westchester NY and was instrumental in overseeing a \$6 million budget for respite programs in Westchester NY. After moving to Rhode Island, she became a Realtor with Residential Properties. She was heavily involved with Meeting Street School and participates at diverse levels and contributes to the Parent Advisory Board. She was part of BHDDH's Barriers Workgroup on restructuring the consent decree. Currently she is the founder and director of 401 A League of Our Own, an adaptive Buddy Ball League in Rhode Island.

Bethany Hogan sits on the Council as an Educational Advocate at the Paul V. Sherlock Center on Disabilities at Rhode Island College. The RI Department of Education appointed her to make educational decisions for children and youth with disabilities who are in RI's foster care system. She was a middle and high school teacher of English Language Arts, English Enrichment, and Literacy. She worked with families navigating their public-school districts at the state's designated Parent Information Center. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree from Rhode Island College. Most importantly, she is the Mom to two young men who happen to have disabilities. Being their advocate has enabled her to work with agencies and organizations around the state to help increase positive outcomes for all individuals with disabilities.



Olivia Lozier is a Legal Advocate at Disability Rights Rhode Island (DRRI) and recent graduate of Roger Williams University, where she earned her B.A. in Psychology and Cultural Studies. Her experience with Protection and Advocacy (P&A) began in Washington, D.C as an intern for the National Disability Rights Network (NDRN), the national membership association for the P&A/CAP network. She worked closely with NDRNs public policy team to research, track, and comment on legislation helpful to the P&A network. It is this role that sparked her interest in the work that DRRI does on the state level, bringing her back to Rhode Island to intern at DRRI while finishing her last semester of college. This role furthered her passion for disability justice, leading her to come on board as DRRI Legal Advocate. Liv works on a variety of projects including outreach, developing fact sheets and self-advocacy materials, and assisting the DRRI attorneys with client work.

Tracey Martins has spent 30-plus years in the field of day and supported employment for individuals served by multiple state departments including The Division of Developmental Disabilities, The Department of Veterans Affairs, The Department of Transitional Services, various state Vocational Rehabilitation agencies, and Ticket to Work. She has been successful in assisting organizations in transformation projects and building successful leadership teams, in multiple states until settling in Rhode Island where she served as the Associate Director of Employment at Behavioral Health Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals before becoming the CEO/ President at Accesspoint Rhode Island. She is an active member of multiple committees including the Institute of Community Inclusion Advisory Board in Boston, the RI Governor's Commission on Disabilities- employment committee, and the Governors Workforce Board Career Pathways Advisory Committee. She is also a recent graduate of Salve Regina University's Dual Master's Program in Rehabilitation Counseling and Innovation and Strategic Management which has fueled her enthusiasm for promoting system change in Rhode Island.

Jay Mollo embarked on his journey at IGT in 2016, where he has been able to consistently contribute to fostering a culture of belonging and inclusivity as a Human Resources Professional in various leadership roles. With a commitment to excellence, combined with a persistent continuous improvement mindset, he has been able to support IGT in enhancing organizational talent development, thought leadership, advancement of strategic initiatives, and leading a team of experienced Talent Acquisition Professionals.

Being connected to the community and advocating for local organizations that support the most vulnerable is a passion of Jay's. He currently serves on the 2025 American Heart Association's Southern New England Heart Walk Executive Committee, the State Rehabilitation Council, and he is a recent graduate of the 2024 Leadership Rhode Island Upsilon II Core Program. In addition, he enjoys coaching youth sports for Cranston League for Cranston's Futures (C.L.C.F.) and Scituate Foster Little League.

Jay holds a Bachelor's Degree in Public Administration and Justice Studies, with a concentration in Political Science at Rhode Island College where he graduated with the distinction of cum laude. He currently serves on the Product Advisory Board of Upwage and on the Leadership Rhode Island New Programs Advisory Committee.

Morna A. Murray, J.D. is an expert in state and federal policy and programs for vulnerable people and people with disabilities. She is a chief executive who has successfully led strategic and innovative organizational change in the non-profit and governmental sectors. Morna is currently the Executive Director of Disability Rights Rhode Island (DRRI), the federally mandated Protection & Advocacy (P&A) agency for the state of Rhode Island, dedicated to protecting and advocating for the legal rights of individuals with disabilities. She has more than 25 years' experience working in public policy and advocacy in the private sector, state government, and the U.S. Senate. Prior to DRRI, Morna served as Commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Developmental Services, and a member of Governor Dan Malloy's cabinet. In that position, she oversaw state services for children and adults with disabilities throughout Connecticut. Prior to that, she was President and CEO of the Connecticut Community Providers Association, advocating and lobbying for disabilities and behavioral health non-profit providers at the state level.

From 2007-2010, Morna served as Senior Counsel to Senator Bob Casey, Jr. (D-PA), leading all healthcare and children's issues. She was Senator Casey's lead staff during the development and passage of the Affordable Care Act. She worked with key national and state stakeholders in drafting legislation in the areas of autism, disabilities, early childhood, childcare, mental health parity, and multiple other issues. Morna previously served as Director of Youth Development for the Children's Defense Fund, Washington, D.C. A graduate of the George Washington University Law School, she is a member of the Connecticut, District of Columbia, and Florida Bars. She has two adult children and three grandchildren.

Rene Rico currently works as the Administrator of Rehabilitative Services at the RI State Psychiatric Hospital. As an administrator her responsibilities include oversight of all rehabilitative services including Psychology, Social Work, Occupational Therapy, and Therapeutic Recreation. She brings eighteen years of professional experience in human services, specifically working with individuals living with psychiatric and substance use disorders. She obtained an undergraduate degree from the University of RI in Sociology with a minor in Criminal Justice and later obtained a graduate degree from Salve Regina University in Rehabilitation Counseling and a Certificate of Advanced Graduate Studies in Mental Health.

Rene is a member of the Narragansett Indian Tribal Nation; on her maternal side, and the daughter of a Bolivian father who emigrated to the US in the 1960's. The unique experience of being first generation Bolivian and an Indigenous American has provided her with a deep connection to diversity and inclusion for all. Rene is honored to be involved in the Latina Leadership Institute, graduating in the class of 2013. The goal of the institute is to empower women to become leaders in the community at all levels of service. In addition, she sits on the BHDDH Race Equity Committee, the RI State Rehabilitation Council and is the chair of the RISPH Health Equity Committee.

Nicole Rico Serrano is a member of the State Plan, Policy, and Quality Assurance Committee. She sits on the Council representing the American Indian VR program. She is the Project Director for the Mashantucket Tribal Nation Rehabilitation Program in Mashantucket, CT. She has worked in the tribal communities of RI and CT for eleven years as a vocational rehabilitation counselor and the past five years as the Program Director for Mashantucket.

Nicole is a Narragansett tribal member and is committed to advocating on behalf of the tribal communities to bring cultural awareness and Indigenous representation to both RI and CT. She has a bachelor's degree in International Relations and Spanish and a Master's Degree in Elementary Education.

Christine Yankee is a member of the State Plan, Policy, and Quality Assurance Committee. She sits on the Council representing a Community Rehabilitation Program Service Provider and individuals with barriers to employment. Christine is the Vice President of Program Services at Goodwill of Southern New England. She brings over 25 years of experience in the areas of workforce development, adult education, and transition services for youth and adults with and without disabilities. Her committee work includes representing Goodwill at the RI Workforce Alliance Meeting, and as a Providence/Cranston Workforce Development board member.

Vocational Rehabilitation Services

Ex-officio Joseph Murphy, Associate Director, Vocational Rehabilitation (VR). Employed by the Office of Rehabilitation Services (ORS) for 23 years, he was recently named Associate Director of the ORS in April 2022. He has worked as a VR Counselor, Transition Counselor, Regional Supervisor, Assistant Administrator and Administrator. Joe has a Master's Degree in Rehabilitation Counseling from Assumption College and has been a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor since 2000 and a Certified Employment Support Professional since 2015. Before coming to the ORS, Joe worked in the Vocational Rehabilitation field at a community mental health center for four years and then at a school for students with disabilities for another four years.

Natalia Montoya, M.A., CRC, is a member of the State Plan, Policy, and Quality Assurance Committee. She sits on the Council as Liaison for the Office of Rehabilitation Services (ORS) as a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor with knowledge of and experience with Vocational Programs and community services for the ORS participants. Natalia is a VRC II in the South County Region and has been working for the Office of Rehabilitation Services since 2014 serving the adult population and youth in transition. In addition to her work with the Council, she is also the liaison to North Kingstown High School, South Kingstown High School, Bradley School South County, South County Chamber of Commerce, Galilee Mission Liaison, College Unbound Liaison, South Shore Mental Health, and she is a member of the BEST (Business Engagement Specialist Team) at the ORS.



Karen Davis, Administrator, has been employed by the Office of Rehabilitation Services (ORS) for 20 years. While at the ORS, she has worked as a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor I, Supervisor, and Assistant Administrator for the Supported Employment Program. She has a Master's Degree in Rehabilitation Counseling and is a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor. Before coming to the ORS, she worked in Private Rehabilitation for 16 years, working with individuals who have been injured at work.

Supporting Personnel

Laurie DiOrio, Administrator of Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Linda Deschenes, Assistant Administrator of Operations

John Valentine, Strategic Planning Supervisor

Nancy Baker, SRC Facilitator/Contact

ORS Staff Strategic Planning Day



RISRC Partnership with National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils (NCSRC)

The State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) is an active long-time member of the National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils (NCSRC). The NCSRC strives to cultivate the strengths and necessary expertise of local SRCs, Increase the capacity of SRCs through education & training to become effective partners in the vocational rehabilitation (VR) program. As each SRC maintains their respective individuality, the NCSRC provides a national resource to those Councils who may need to connect with a peer state on issues along with providing a mechanism for training with subject matter experts.

NCSRC Mission: On behalf of people with disabilities, our national membership coalition will advocate for and work in partnership with the national public vocational rehabilitation system's continual quest for excellence.

NCSRC Vision: NCSRC will be the premiere national organization of the consumer voice to enhance the employment opportunities of persons with disabilities through the public vocational rehabilitation system.

NCSRC Core Values:

Integrity - We are honest and straightforward in all that we do. We treat everyone with dignity and respect. We act responsibly with resources entrusted to us. We are accountable and act in accordance with these values.

Commitment - We support the full implementation and enforcement of disability non-discrimination laws, particularly the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

Excellence - We trust that customers of public vocational rehabilitation will be empowered to make choices which lead to ultimate independence.

Advocacy - We will work to educate and inform the public and government policy makers regarding issues affecting people with disabilities.

Diversity - We will uphold a broad definition of diversity that honors and appreciates disability alongside race, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, and religion as an integral part of the human experience.

Leadership - We will foster leadership among people with disabilities that upholds excellence, quality, and inclusive opportunities.

Partnership - We will promote a positive collaboration with state and non-governmental agencies to enhance meaningful and sustainable employment for people with disabilities.

Teamwork - We are committed to a partnership based on a spirit of trust and cooperation with Vocational Rehabilitation Administrators and staff so that collaborative efforts will benefit from the NCSRC customer voice.

Culture - We support a public vocational rehabilitation service system that is structured in a manner that reflects the social, political, historic, and economic experience of disability.

Communication - We value effective communication through appropriate formats.

The NCSRC currently consists of 53 SRCs of states and territories that provide public VR services. In addition to conference calls every two months, the NCSRC hosts two training conferences each year that coincide with the national meetings of the Council of State Administrators for Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) in collaboration with the Rehabilitation Services.



DHS does not discriminate against any person on the basis of race, color, national origin, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, age, religion or sex in acceptance for or provision of services, employment or treatment in its educational and other programs and activities.



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